

Bicycling used to be thought of as only a recreational activity, important for personal pleasure and fitness, perhaps, but of no real consequence to the economies of our communities, much less our nation.

Not anymore.

Today, the increased popularity of bicycling for transportation as well as recreation means that the bicycle industry is playing an increasingly significant role in local economies.

Just think – the average operating cost of a bicycle is just 2.5% of that of a car.^[i] That's more discretionary income for bicyclists to spend on other items locally, such as housing, food, education, or recreation.

In Maine, bicycle tourism contributed \$66.8 million to that state's economy; in Colorado, that figure is \$193 million.^[ii] Wisconsin attributes \$278 million of its economy to bicycle tourism.^[iii]

A 2006 study revealed that the 125 bicycle-related businesses in Portland, OR contributed \$63 million and 800 – 1000 jobs to the local economy.^[iv] Two years later, there were an additional 50 bike-related businesses, raising the total economic impact to \$90 million.

Bicycling has a significant impact on our national economy as well, where it's a \$5.8 billion industry, employing close to 100,000 people in research and development, manufacturing, distribution, retail sales, service, and tourism.^[v] In 2005, Americans bought 19.8 million bicycles – surpassing the total number of cars and trucks sold nationwide by 4.4 million.

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To keep pace with the rapidly growing interest in bicycles, local jurisdictions and states are finding that investing in bicycle infrastructure provides a high rate of return.

The Federal Highway Administration estimates the cost of building a single mile of urban, four-lane highway to be between \$20 million and \$80 million; in urban areas where traffic congestion is the worst, that figure can easily explode to \$290 million a mile.^[vii] But the cost of building a mile of bicycle or pedestrian facilities is only in the range of a few thousand dollars up to \$1 million.^[viii]

The bicycle network in Portland, OR, for example, cost on average \$300,000/mile; the cost to convert surface streets to multi-use 'bicycle boulevards' is even less, at \$30,000 to \$40,000 per mile. These investments have been paying off, big time: minimal investments to create "complete streets" -- i.e, those with bike lanes, sidewalks, safety medians and landscaping -- resulted in a 74% increase in bicycle commuting.

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Sources

[i] Active Transportation for America, 2008 Rails to Trails Conservancy

[ii] Maine Department of Transportation; Colorado Department of Transportation.

[iii] Bicycle Federation of America

[iv] National Sporting Goods Association

[vi] National Bicycle Dealers Association; Bureau of Transportation Statistics

[vii] Sissel, S. Cost per Highway Mile. 2008 Personal correspondence to Rails to Trail Conservancy

[viii] Krizek, K, et al, Guidelines for Analysis of Investments in Bicycle Facilities, 2006.

[ix] National Complete Streets Coalition